

Table 1: Count of Black-necked Grebes during January 2003, Gujarat

Site	District	Date	Number
Charakla salt pans	Jamnagar	12.1.2003	1405
Meedha Tidal Regulator	Porbandar	12.1.2003	5
Rosy Pier salt pans	Jamnagar	14.1.2003	4
Sanctuary salt pans	Jamnagar	14.1.2003	18
Total			1432

grebes was recorded at Charakla Salt pans, near Dwarka (22° 14' N, 69° 01' E); the grebes were seen in the salt pan in three groups of 1000, 375 and 30 individuals each. Grebes observed at the other three sites were found either singly or in pairs.

We also saw one white coloured Black-necked Grebe, with some black splashes on the head and sides of its body, amongst a group of thousand birds at Charakla Salt pans. The white grebe was at ease with the other grebes with normal plumage and was also seen diving occasionally like its conspecifics.

The highest concentration of Black-necked Grebes (201) was first reported in December 1996 from Charakla Salt pans (Parasharya *et al.* 1998). Earlier, about 50 grebes (Balar and Balar 1999) had been spotted on January 10, 1996; and Bhaskaran (1996) had spotted about 51 grebes in October 1996. Since 1996, significantly higher concentrations of grebes have been observed every year at the same site by the birdwatchers of Gujarat. Balar and Balar (1999) reported about 800-1000 grebes in January 1999; they had taken several photographs, one of which was published in the Times of

India dated June 26, 1999.

Two hundred and fifty birds represent 1% biogeographical population of Black-necked Grebe (Wetlands International 2002). A site becomes internationally important if it supports more than 1% biogeographical population of any one species of waterfowl regularly. Charakla Salt pans seems to be an internationally important site for Black-necked Grebe as it has supported high concentrations of the species on a regular basis since 1996.

All the present sightings are on the Gulf of Kachchh (Jamnagar district) or in its vicinity (Porbandar district). Parasharya and Mukherjee (1998) had also reported concentration of grebes around these two districts. Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000) have reported regular occurrence of grebes along the coast of the Gulf of Kachchh. Hence, all the salt pans along the southern coast of the Gulf of Kachchh should be checked for the occurrence of Black-necked Grebe.

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7. MIGRATION OF BLACK-EARED OR LARGE INDIAN KITE *MILVUS MIGRANS LINEATUS* (GRAY) FROM MONGOLIA TO NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

The Black-eared or Large Indian Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus* (Gray) is regarded as a resident with unclear abundance in Assam (Choudhury 2000) while the subspecies *govinda* is among the most abundant birds. Ali and Ripley (1987) had quoted Baker (FBI No. 1788, Vol. 5: 124) about its breeding in the hills, south of the Brahmaputra river and mentioned that elsewhere in India (excluding extreme south) it is a winter visitor in small numbers. On migration they stated, referring Frank Ludlow (*Ibis* 1937: 493), coming from north

through Bhutan on September 5. Thus, little data is available on its migration.

A single specimen of *Milvus migrans lineatus* was captured live by a villager near Loktak Lake in Manipur on October 22, 2001. It was near Mayong Imphal (24° 36' N, 93° 54' E) towards east of the lake at an elevation of 790 m above msl. Efforts to buy the bird and release it back did not succeed as the owner refused to sell it. The bird had a ring marked "Hiddensee Germania EA 096970". After a lot of



Fig. 1: Map showing the places mentioned in the text

communication, I learnt that the bird was ringed in Mongolia at 44.25° N, 105.19° E, as a nestling on July 18, 2001 on an Elm (*Ulmus*) by Prof. Dr. Michael Stubbe from the University of Halle, Germany.

This was perhaps the first concrete evidence of migration of *Milyus migrans lineatus* from Mongolia to India.

I thank Dr. R.K. Ranjan Singh of Manipur University for locating the ringed bird and informing me. I also thank Jessica Scheider of Frankfurt for confirming the Mongolian information.

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8. MAMMALIAN PREY SPECIES OF THE FOREST OWLET

HETEROGLAUX BLEWITTI HUME

The Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) is one of the least known endemic birds of India. It was considered to be extinct for 113 years until its rediscovery in Toranmal Reserve Forest in Maharashtra (King and Rasmussen 1998). Little has been published on the diet of the Forest Owlet (Rasmussen and Ishtiaq 1999; Ishtiaq *et al.* 2002). Earlier studies on the foraging ecology of the Forest Owlet reveal that its food consists of 58.8% skink and other lizards, 15.8% field mice and rats, 2.3% birds, 1.8% grasshoppers, 0.6% caterpillars, 0.6% frogs and 20.5% unidentified prey item (Ishtiaq *et al.* 2002). However, according to the pellet analysis by Jathar and Rahmani (2002), insects is the main diet of the Forest Owlet (41%) followed by mammals (36%), reptiles (16%) and remaining (7%) comprised of birds, arachnids and amphibians. Information on mammalian prey species of the Forest Owlet is anecdotal. The primary aim of this note is to describe mammalian prey species of the Forest Owlet.

The study was conducted in Toranmal Reserve Forest of Shahada taluk, in Nandurbar district, Maharashtra, India. The study area lies between 21° 47' N and 74° 28' E to 21° 49' N and 74° 29' E, at an altitude of 450 m to 550 m. Toranmal lies in the Akrani hills of west Satpura mountain ranges.

The Forest Owlet is found in open wooded habitat near stream beds dominated by Teak and other tree species such as *Boswellia serrata*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Lanea grandis*, *Lagerstroemia parvifolia* interspersed with low lying bushes and grass.

Pellets were collected regularly from four pairs at four different locations for seventeen months (November 2001 to June 2003). The location coordinates, altitude and numbers of pellets were recorded. All the pellets were collected from a diurnal roost of Forest Owlet. Efforts were made to collect a large number of pellets and care was taken to avoid collection of pellets of other owl species. All pellets were sun-dried, numbered and kept in polythene bags, with collection data.

The pellets were dissected using standard techniques (Yalden and Morris 1990). The material was segregated according to class: arachnids, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. Prey items were identified to the finest possible taxonomic level at the Zoological Survey of India, Pune by the second and third author. Jawbone and skull pieces showing key characters like molars, incisors, nasals, pallet, mandibles were used for identifying mammals up to species level, using Corbet and Hill (1992) and Agrawal (2000).